

PEOPLE and THINGS: By ATTICUS

SOME years ago Mr. R. G. Lardner told me that whenever he came to London he wandered about the streets and was deeply content. "Dickens," he said, "has populated London with so many old friends that I feel I have come home to a reunion."

In emulation of our distinguished kinsman I wandered in Westminster one day last week and saw a lot of earnest people crowding into Church House. The attraction was Dame Edith Sitwell who was to speak on the subject of poetry, and the auditorium could not have held a bigger audience if the attraction had been Colonel Nasser or Mr. Liberace.

Dame Edith is at once mildly and formidable, an undoubted Olympian who does not despise the groundings. There was a respectful silence when she assured us that the essence of form is indivisible, that younger poets do not know how to use consonants and that you need not live a good life to be happy. But not all of us will agree with her pronouncement that the poem should be about something. Give us the sound and the sense will look after itself.

A Dominated House

WHILE Dame Edith was holding forth at Church House the gladiators were preparing for the Suez show-down at Westminster. It was the second day of the debate and the Prime Minister, who was below his best form when he opened the oratorical contest, was to wind up.

And where was Mr. Macmillan as twilight came upon the Terrace? A political friend tells me that he was in the smoke room chatting with three or four of his friends, in appearance completely unperturbed and in high good humour. When, at 9.30, he rose to wind up the debate, he spoke with such mastery of the House that even Aneurin Bevan was subdued to silence.

Every Prime Minister brings something special to his task or he would not hold supreme office. Churchill made history in full view, Attlee reduced debates to committee discussions, Baldwin mesmerised the House with the sound of words and Chamberlain turned it into a board meeting.

Harold Macmillan's contribution is intellect. His mind so dominates the House that Nye Bevan's verbal sensuality faded from scarlet to a modest pink.

A Grim Echo

HOW strange it is to read of the trial of Dietrich and Lippert at Munich, for their part in the night of the long knives, when Hitler and his murderers shot Roehm and a

number of his grisly Nazi friends.

I was in Berlin at the time, having gone there to attend an arts festival, and the whole city was in the grip of terror. Business men who had taken no part in the Nazi movement



A censored page in the Nazi "Who's Who."

wandered about the streets afraid to go to their homes. Rumours gave birth to rumours, and there was no comfort when the long night passed and there came the dawn.

By a grim coincidence a big book which might be called "Who's Who in the Nazi Party" was in the printers' hands. Instructions were sent by the party to take out a number of the biographies, since many of them had died in the purge. The startled publishers obeyed orders and then issued the book with the blank spaces clearly indicating the importance, or the minor importance, of the men who had been bumped off. Alphabetically, many of the blank spaces could be identified.

I imagine the book should have some value as a collector's piece, but I shall never forget how horror stalked the streets that night.

The Naughty Pearls

TWENTY-FIVE years ago a young Danish girl made her curtsy to King George V and Queen Mary at Buckingham Palace, being presented by the Danish Minister's wife, Countess Ahlefeldt-Laurvig. The evening changed her life; it was there she met her future husband, Count Karl Ahlefeldt-Laurvig, her sponsor's eldest son.

This week, now Countess Thea Ahlefeldt-Laurvig, she will be in attendance on the

Queen during the State visit to Denmark.

When the Countess left her lovely castle at Tranekær, on the island of Langeland, to come to Copenhagen in readiness for the Queen's arrival on Tuesday, she took with her the family jewellery — the diamond tiara and the "naughty pearls." These pearls once belonged to Countess Billie, who 90 years ago went to St. Petersburg as lady-in-waiting to the future Empress Marie Feodorovna, who was Danish. The old Tsar Alexander II was determined that his young daughter-in-law should receive his mistress en titre, and he tactfully approached Countess Billie to arrange the presentation.

The Countess was in a quandary; but to refuse would be to disobey the Tsar of All the Russias. She arranged a meeting, and when she undid her napkin at dinner that evening, out slipped four enormous Russian pearls.

These, the "naughty pearls," later came into the Ahlefeldt family, and Countess Thea Ahlefeldt-Laurvig will be wearing them at the State banquet for the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at Copenhagen on Tuesday.

Requiem for a Conductor

THERE will be a dramatic moment in the life of London when impresario Gorkinsky presents Verdi's Requiem at the Festival Hall as a memorial to Guido Cantelli, who was killed in an air crash near Paris. Cantelli's last appearance was when he conducted the orchestra and chorus in Verdi's masterpiece in the same hall.

In many ways Cantelli had the musical world at his feet, even though there were some critics who thought that his early promise had not been completely fulfilled. Signor Toscanini had nominated him as his successor at La Scala, and the news of Cantelli's death was kept from the maestro, who himself was at the point of death.

Cantelli was the first "enemy" conductor to come

to London after the war. He was unknown to the British public and was filling in for de Sabata, who was ill, but he proved that he was not only a brilliant conductor, but, no mean actor. He was of medium height, but when he took up his baton for Tchaikovsky's Fifth he seemed to stretch upwards until he became almost a towering Muscovite.

He was given a tremendous

reception that night, and a dazzling future spread before him. New York acclaimed him. London was at his feet and the years were on his side. On his last visit he came to the house of some friends after the concert and stayed so late that at last his host told him he must go home to his hotel.

Cantelli pleaded like a small boy to be allowed to stay up. Looking back, it almost seemed

that he had a premonition that his future could be counted in weeks, almost in days.

Royal Screen-writer

IT is not surprising that the Duke of Edinburgh scored a great success when he dined with the British Screen and Television Writers' Association. He has a remarkable quality of associating himself with the inner thoughts of those with whom he mingles. When Mr. Frank Launder put forward the

suggestion that screen-writers, like novelists, should be paid on a royalty basis, the great of honour thoroughly agreed.

"I know what it is," he said, "to endure the agony of staring at the blank page for hours at a time, and for hours beforehand too."

The Duke, already a Fishmonger and a member of the Court of the Fishmongers Company, is now officially a screen-writer, although it is unlikely that he will be able to give very much time either to fish or films. It was the Fishmongers Company that commissioned the controversial portrait by Annigoni, but it is doubtful if the screen-writers will venture into such controversial activities.

Grand Design

ONE has hardly been able to pick up a newspaper during the last couple of weeks without reading about the "Grand Design." But when I ask my friends, "Do you know what the Grand Design was originally?" they make the haziest and most varied guesses.

Ignorant myself, I tried reference books, but I am told that the Grand Design was a plan, attributed by Sully to Henri IV of France, and rendered abortive by his assassination, for a great Protestant Union against the Holy Roman Empire. A peculiarly inept and ill-omened eponym for the British tidying-up project which was so roughly handled at Strasbourg last week!

Double Entente

A WELCOME reappearance on the London scene will be made this week by M. Rene Massigli, French Ambassador to Britain from 1944 to 1955, when he delivers the seventh Stevenson Memorial lecture at the London School of Economics on Tuesday.

This lecture — under the auspices of the E.C. and the Royal Institute of International Affairs — on "New Conceptions of French Policy in Tropical Africa" is an unusual occasion; foreign ambassadors rarely find the opportunity publicly to renew their old associations.

A week later, on May 28, another distinguished Frenchman will address a London audience, M. Soustelle, who after being a post-war Governor-General of Algeria and a United Nations delegate is now professor of sociology at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, will talk to Chatham

House members on the Algerian tragedy. This double French attraction helps to emphasise still further the growing rapprochement between the two countries, a process which M. Massigli did much to stimulate.

Attendance at both lectures I must add, is by invitation only, but M. Massigli's address will subsequently be published.

Selling for Dollars

THE Dollar Export Council which surely should be named the Dollar Imports Council, tells me that two of America's top marketing experts, Professor Robert Seymour and Mr. Charles Johnson, are about to hold "off the record" conferences with leaders of British industries in many parts of Britain.

These gentlemen have been making a tour of Britain and have formed definite impressions on how to increase British exports to the U.S.A. I know nothing about our visitors; but they could not be more welcome if they were old friends.

There is little doubt that Britain's invasion of the vast American market has been left too much to individuals and has lacked the resources which are essential to such a campaign. There is an immense goodwill towards Britain in America, but we have never publicised our goods to the extent that is required. It might be a good thing if the President of the Board of Trade kept before him that short poem of infinite wisdom:

*Who he whispers down a well
About the goods he has to sell
Will not earn as many dollars
As he who climbs a tree and hollers.*

People and Words

"The only thing I envy Egonian and Harrovians for is that they are not only two magnificent schools, but they are also magnificent trade unions."

—SIR IYOR EVANS,
Provost of University College, London.

"Every time you get bored you die a little."

—DOLORES DEL RÍO.
"It is invariably men—masculine Mrs. Grundys—who make all restrictive conditions about the dress, appearance and deportment of women."

—MR. J. G. LAURE,
President of the Manufacturers' Association.

"When I was an ordinary City worker I would pop into the pui down the street for a beer—but you can't do that sort of thing when you are Lord Mayor!"

—SIR CULTURE WELCH,
Lord Mayor of London.

"Reason has never played such a large part in international affairs as emotion."

—EARL RUSSELL, O.M.